

Response to the Nelsens' "Case Example"

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the only problem is that Goebel is discussing the Separatists of Plymouth, not the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay. Goebel himself notes (1931: 418-419) that the Puritans were better-educated in all fields, including the law, than the comparatively humble Plymouth settlers.

As for his sociological analysis, Erikson never adequately resolves the problem of incidence of offenses versus detection. Since he apparently knew that church and civil courts had overlapping jurisdiction, it might have been well for him to have attempted to compare the rates of convictions. In addition, his once-a-deviant, always-a-deviant idea (Erikson, 1966: 196), which he traces in his discussion of the prison systems of Auburn and Philadelphia (Erikson, 1966: 203), hardly survives analysis. In the major case for which he has figures, that of the Quaker "crime wave," he himself notes that the fifty-one persons he has traced as being responsible for "Quaker" offenses "were responsible for very few offenses either before or after the Quaker crisis" (Erikson, 1966: 178).

Finally, in considering the general miscarriage of a creative approach to an analysis of the problem of deviancy, it might be well for methodology courses in sociology to contain at least a section on the use of reference materials in history.¹ There is no reason why the sociologist who attempts historical research should not produce reliable results that are of interest and value to both historians and sociologists.

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RESPONSE TO THE NELSENS' "CASE EXAMPLE"

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I am not sure how to respond to this paper. It is easy enough to contest the particular issues raised by the Nelsens, and I will do so below; but in many ways this strategy confronts neither the main thrust of their criticism nor the substance of my own reaction to it. The Nelsens think they see signs in *Wayward Puritans* that I have misrepresented the evidence, misquoted the sources, manipulated the data, and generally behaved in an irresponsible manner. In that sense, the tone of their criticism reflects a suspicion that reaches far beyond the details they have singled out for comment.

My own reaction to the paper cannot be fully conveyed by a discussion of details either. It seems evident to me that the Nelsens were convinced long before they opened the volume that sociologists in general are historically illiterate and that "functionalists" in particular suffer from some curious kind of moral disorder. More important, perhaps, the Nelsens seem to be operating on the extraordinary assumption that *Wayward Puritans* was

written as an "application of sociological method to history"—which is simply not the case. The study of history is a noble occupation, but this book happens to be devoted to something else.

Exchanges of this sort usually take place in an intramural setting, which means that combatants and audience alike share some common grounding in the subject at hand. Most readers of this journal, however, are not historians, and they will probably be interested in knowing whether the Nelsens are representing the field from which they come or are simply expressing some private reservations of their own. I submit that they are doing the latter. *Wayward Puritans* has been reviewed by a number of scholars whose credentials in New England history are quite in order, and they generally found the book competent and responsible even though they were not always persuaded by its main arguments. The quarrel between the Nelsens and myself, then, is not one between history and sociology.

A few of the general points raised in the paper are entirely correct, and I will begin on the congenial note of acknowledging them. It is true that I do not have any formal training in historiography, and I will even add that there are several mistakes in the text that I might not have made had I been so trained. It is also true that I relied rather heavily on secondary sources: indeed, I made a special point of saying so in the foreword to the book. These criticisms do not trouble me very greatly. No sociologist who becomes acquainted with a historical period while pursuing some broader sociological generalization is likely to know as much about that period as historians who have spent their whole professional lives there, and if this were a serious handicap to interdisciplinary work we would all have to give up the effort at once.

The issue, however, is not whether I am a certified expert on New England history but whether the conclusions I reached in the book are credible, and luckily for me the Nelsens have been fair enough to state in explicit detail where they think I have been in error. In the paragraphs to follow I will repeat what seem to me the more critical passages from the Nelsens' article and comment on them in order.

Erikson is a functionalist, and it is perhaps this above all else which has determined his grasp of historical data. His functionalism leads him astray, causing him to misquote and misrepresent in his effort to make the data conform to his theory.

I am not sure whether or not I should be stung by the accusation that I am a functionalist, since I have no way of knowing what the Nelsens mean by the term: I have never described my own work in that way and I am not much taken by the notion that what I write or think can be explained so simply. The Nelsens' assumption that functionalism is a subversive enough influence to drive honest men astray and "cause" them to commit serious errors of judgment almost hints a little of demonology. It does not follow, so far as I can see, that functionalists are more corrupt than men of other persuasions, and if I am negligent in any of these respects, more evidence is surely necessary than the use of some party label. Misquotation, for instance, is a serious charge. I think an example would be in order.

In order to make his case, he must paint the Puritans as a group cut off from England and the rest of the world and have those two Quaker housewives who started it all float into Boston "on the crest of a worldwide reaction against the very kind of orthodoxy the settlers were trying to establish." To make this at all effective, he must neglect to mention the fact that the Quakers were the most popularly hated sect in England. . . .

It is true, I suppose, that the comments I made in the passage referred to above did help my case, although this fact hardly makes them inaccurate. By the testimony of the settlers themselves and of every historian who has written on the matter, the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay *did* feel that they were cut off from the rest of the world and *were* becoming the target of a wave of reaction against the kind of orthodoxy they were trying to establish. The Nelsens do not really argue that I am mistaken

on those points: instead, they contend that if I had written more fully about the fate of Quakers in England my analysis would collapse in a rude pile of debris. Well, the reason I did not deal with that topic in the first place is that it would not have informed my argument one way or the other. I was concerned with the response of the settlers to a group of people they defined as deviant and asking why this response took the form it did. All I needed to establish in this connection was that England was gradually moving toward a policy of religious toleration and that this new development was disagreeable to the colonists. The fact that Quakers were generally disliked in England does not change any of this in the slightest.

Once the Quakers have invaded, it is necessary to his argument that they be "joined in their missionary efforts by a large number of local converts." Erikson is observably unspecific here. Perhaps it is because he noticed, in one of the few sources he used, that "with one exception, the conversions occurred in Salem, where seven church members joined the Quaker faith between 1662 and 1703" (Oberholzer). Eight converts hardly seem sufficient to constitute a crime wave in anyone's book.

Looking back over the original passage, I am a little sorry that I employed the term "convert," because neither Oberholzer nor I nor the Nelsens have any idea how many persons actually converted in the formal sense. But the rest of the Nelsens' argument is rather peevish. The source they are consulting here is an account of *church* hearings during the early years of the colony, and the information they are repeating simply tells us that the churches did not take a very active role in prosecuting Quakers. The figures from which I drew my own conclusions, however, were taken from *court* records (a primary source, I believe) of the county in which most of the action took place. These data, presented elsewhere in my book, show that there were at least fifty-one local residents who can be reasonably listed as adherents to the Quaker cause and who were convicted of Quaker activities *in that one county alone*, and that this group was responsible for 375 Quaker-related offenses in the space of fifteen years. I do not insist that the Nelsens regard these figures as evidence that a "crime wave" was in motion somewhere, but most fair-minded readers will at least understand why I chose to do so; and the implication that I wrote the section in full knowledge of the fact that there were only eight local Quakers in the whole of the colony strikes me as both irresponsible and ill-tempered.

Erikson's treatment of the Quakers illustrates in two important ways at least one functionalist's inability to deal adequately with large-scale social change. First, in the late 1650's and early 1660's the Massachusetts Bay colonists were intimately concerned with a religious question, but it was not that of the Quakers

All the Nelsens have done here, it seems to me, is nominate another crisis in the early years of the Bay and declare that it is more important than my candidate. This does not have anything to do with handling problems of social change or with the failure of functionalism. Only two things need be said here. First, the main thesis of the book—to which the Nelsens pay no attention whatever—is not even remotely affected by the possibility that

the colonists were also worried by questions of church membership. Second, I would still argue that the settlers were very concerned about the Quakers, and I would cite as my evidence the fact that they hanged several, flogged dozens, and generally harassed a number that probably reached into the hundreds. The notion that the Quakers represented an irritant of considerable importance is certainly not original with me, and the Nelsens' assurances that the settlers were not particularly alarmed by the Quakers represent not only a criticism of my work but a departure from a long tradition of New England historiography.

The long comment on Charles II and his letter to the General Court has me a little more on the defensive, because I can see in reviewing the chapter in question that I did state the case rather awkwardly. But not for the reasons indicated by the Nelsens. For what it is worth, I have known since at least the eighth grade that Charles's administration was Anglican and that the King himself did not have any special affection for Quakers. I related in my book that the Quakers appealed to Charles for protection, which is fact, and that these appeals were among his reasons for writing the letter, which is conjecture. I can appreciate what is worrying the Nelsens here, but I did not mean to imply (and I certainly did not say) that the King's letter applied directly to the Quakers. It is generally understood, of course, that Charles's purpose in sending the letter was to promote the interests of Anglicans living in the Bay, as his reference to the Book of Common Prayer and his order that men be permitted "to perform their devotions in that manner as is established here" make clear. My object in discussing this matter at all was to suggest that it, along with several other developments cited in the book, helped to weaken the structure of orthodoxy in Massachusetts Bay and contributed to the uncertainties reflected in the Quaker persecution. I still hold to that point. I will grant, however, that I allowed the momentum of the story to sweep across an important qualifying detail by drawing too close a connection between the Quaker campaign and the King's message.

And then there are a number of smaller criticisms scattered throughout the Nelsens' presentation—assorted scraps of evidence to the effect that I do not approach the study of history with appropriate reverence. The complaint that I select my secondary sources to suit the purpose of my argument can be made about anyone engaged in scholarship; the implication that I do so *deliberately*, however, is a subject on which the Nelsens have no information at all, and I can only deny that it is true. The complaint that I do not pay much attention to sermons is partly correct, although I have read a fair sample of them and concluded that they were not really relevant to my argument. The fact that I "use" an abridged version of Samuel Sewall's diary may seem less damaging if I note, as the Nelsens do not, that neither the man nor his work is referred to once in the whole of the text: the Nelsens found this item hidden discreetly in the bibliography. Also, the Nelsens' "standard form" for footnotes may have many advantages over my own, but page numbers appear whenever the note serves to identify the source of a quotation and do not appear when the note simply draws atten-

tion to a book or article. It happens, by the way, that page numbers are indicated in over 80 per cent of the footnotes: if the Nelsens' assertion that "page numbers are usually omitted" is a sample of their powers of observation, I can more readily understand why we seem to disagree so often on matters of evidence. (The Nelsens could at least have assumed that sociologists know how to *count*.)

As for John Norton's celebrated essay on the Quakers, I will simply report that I have in fact read it. It was among the writings I had in mind when I observed that "literature from the period fairly crackles with angry denunciations of the Quakers. . . ." I did not cite the work in my book (1) because I was not impressed that it showed any clear understanding of Quaker theology and (2) because I was aware that the General Court commissioned the tract in recognition of the fact that the general body of colonists did not understand what the Quakers were talking about—which was my point in the first place.

The only portion of the Nelsens' discussion of law and authority that makes any sense to me is the notation that I misdated one of the footnotes. I have developed enough respect for the Nelsens' bibliographical detective work not to argue the point or even to look it up, but as for the rest I must declare myself confused. Surely the Nelsens are not suggesting that I am too dull to know the difference between Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay. Surely they are not suggesting that some dark and cunning purpose has been accomplished by passing off a reference to one colony as a reference to another. And yet it is difficult for me to imagine what else the Nelsens may have in mind here.

As for his sociological analysis, Erikson never adequately resolves the problem of incidence versus detection. Since he apparently knew that church and civil courts had overlapping jurisdiction, it might have been well for him to have attempted to compare the rates.

I did not compare the rates here because the rates are not comparable. In the chapter on "crime waves" I noted that 2,382 offenses were recorded in the Essex County Court between 1641 and 1682; in the same chapter I observed that there were no more than 29 offenses heard in all the churches of Essex County during the same period. Moreover, a number of those 29 cases were presumably also tried in the civil courts, since this is what dual jurisdiction means. Even if it made sense to compare overlapping populations, it does not make sense to compare rates based on such different sets of figures.

In addition, his once-a-deviant, always-a-deviant idea, which he traces in his discussion of the prison systems of Auburn and Philadelphia, hardly survives analysis. In the major case for which he has figures, that of the Quaker "crime wave," he himself notes that the fifty-one persons he has traced as being responsible for "Quaker" offenses "were responsible for very few offenses either before or after the Quaker crisis."

This is a reference I would not have understood at all if the authors had not provided a citation, so on that score alone I am beginning to appreciate the virtues of identifying specific pages even when a direct quotation is not

involved. On the pages at issue, I was discussing Puritan theories of human development and how these theories were reflected in Puritan attitudes toward deviant behavior. It is almost inconceivable to me that anyone could understand me to say in the book that deviation is a permanent condition from which no one can recover. This is exactly the attitude I was criticizing in the Puritans, and, as a matter of fact, the whole chapter to which the Nelsens are alluding here is devoted to the thesis that this attitude is one of the most unfortunate survivals of the Puritan age. I cannot help thinking that if the Nelsens had been reading the text rather than sniffing around its edges for evidence of dereliction, they would not have made so simple a mistake.

I share the Nelsens' hope that sociology and history can manage to create a closer partnership by examining the

same data responsibly, and I agree that sociologists would be better prepared for that partnership if they knew more about history. At the same time, however, the Nelsens may have to learn that a numbed attention to "facts" is not the same thing as confronting ideas. A fact that serves the job of historical explanation still has enough vitality and ambiguity left over to serve other purposes as well, and critics from one field cannot do a responsible job of evaluating the way in which a student from another uses his material unless they give at least a glancing thought to the theoretical contours of his argument.

In their inability to do this, the Nelsens have simply furnished us with a sample of the narrowness and parochialism that one sometimes finds in every scholarly discipline. Sociology has enough of these qualities already without importing them from neighbors.

REMARKS AT ASA CONVENTION

MARTIN NICOLAUS
San Francisco, California

At the Meetings of the American Sociological Association in Boston on August 26, 1968, President Hauser invited five leaders of the Sociology Liberation Movement to meet at lunch with officers of the Association. This was arranged because of reports that a commotion might be made at the Monday evening Plenary Session to be addressed by Secretary Wilber J. Cohen of HEW. President Hauser emphasized Council's concern for orderly discussion and dissent and offered to provide the group time at the Plenary Session for a response to the speaker's remarks. The group delegated two spokesmen to appear at the Plenary Session. We thought that readers of *The American Sociologist* might be interested in their remarks. We have secured the permission of one of the discussants, Mr. Martin A. Nicolaus, to reprint his comments. We first wrote Mr. Nicolaus in November, but because our correspondence had to be forwarded twice, it was not possible to get his permission and manuscript in time for publication before the present issue. In the meantime, Mr. Nicolaus's discussion and a response by Professor Richard Robbins of the University of Massachusetts were printed in the *Boston Globe Sunday Magazine*. Professor Robbins has granted us permission to reprint his discussion along with that of Mr. Nicolaus—THE EDITOR.

These remarks are not addressed to the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. This man has agreed voluntarily to serve as member of a government establishment which is presently fighting a war for survival on two fronts. Imperial wars such as the one against

Vietnam are usually two-front wars, one against the foreign subject population, one against the domestic subject population. The Secretary of HEW is a military officer in the domestic front of the war against people. Experience in the Vietnam teach-in's has shown that dialogue between the subject population and its rulers is an exercise in repressive tolerance. It is, in Robert S. Lynd's words, dialogue between chickens and elephants. He holds some power over me; therefore, even if he is wrong in his arguments he is right, even if I'm right, I'm wrong. I do address myself to the Secretary's audience. There is some hope—even though the hour is very late—that among the members and sympathizers of the sociological profession gathered here there will be some whose life is not so sold and compromised as to be out of their own control to change or amend.

The ruling elite within your profession has invited a speaker who is in charge of what is called Health, Education, and Welfare. Those of you who listened passively to what he had to say presumably agreed that this definition, this description of what the man did, carried an accurate message. Yet among you are many, including the hard researchers, who do know better or should know better. The department of which the man is head is more accurately described as the agency which watches over the inequitable distribution of preventable disease, over the funding of domestic propaganda and indoctrination, and over the preservation of a cheap and docile reserve labor force to keep everybody else's wages down. He is Secretary of Disease, Propaganda, and Scabbing.

This may be put too strongly for you, for *you*, but it all depends on where you look from, where you stand. If you stand inside the Sheraton Hotel these terms are offensive, but if you gentlemen and ladies would care to step across the street into Roxbury you might get a different

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